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WASHINGTON — The administration has brought before Congress the all but unanimous consensus of its joint chiefs that the United States is as strong, if not stronger, than Russia in its deterrent power.

The single holdout is Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, commander of the strategic air force, who wants more funds for a continuous airborne alert, noting that the Soviet Union with 100 missiles could deliver the "deterrent power" before it could be used.

HOWEVER, the unanimity displayed is unusual. In a group, the joint chiefs of staff sees no need to repeat statements the United States is weaker than Russia, or will remain gravely danger because of a "missile gap" a couple of years hence.

The top military, therefore, now stands in general contradiction to the position being taken by Sen. Stuart Symington (D., Mo.) who insists the United States is in grave danger.

After some confusion on the subject, the top military command made its views clearer in testimony Monday before the senate military appropriations subcommittee.

Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates testified that the versatility and strength of United States over-all retaliatory capability is much greater than Russia's.

Analysis:
WHAT THE NEWS MEANS

TESTIMONY GIVEN yesterday leaves Symington in the difficult position of insisting the American people have no idea of the "real threat we are facing in the near future" without being able to support his statement with official data.

Symington seems to base his argument on his interpretation of information supplied in secret by the central intelligence agency (CIA), the same agency which supplies information taken into consideration in making American military decisions. Symington cannot make public secret information supplied to him, or other members of the senate.

If Symington has any other source on Russian capabilities he has not identified it.

Gates made it clear repeatedly that he and the joint chiefs of staff have come to a different conclusion on the basis of CIA, and other, information than Symington.

A STRONG POINT previously on Symington's side was the admission of McElroy, former defense secretary, that "in a couple of years the Soviet Union would achieve a 3-to-1 numerical missile superiority."

Unlike McElroy, Gates is now repeatedly and explicitly giving the reasons why he and the joint chiefs of staff do not consider Soviet numerical superiority in missiles justifies a crash program to build more. Symington's major objective is a crash program to build more intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Gates argued before the senate committee yesterday that while the Russians may at times have superiority in missiles, this is more than offset by American superiority in manned bombers. Gates also favors an increase in the Atlas program, but not on the scale Symington demands.

That is the real argument. Symington wants the crash program now. Gates, confident of present over-all strength, wishes to concentrate on future production of improved missiles to be fired from mobile positions.

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